

Intervention on water and sanitation

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Italy

Mr. Giorgio Sfara

Mr. chairman, your excellencies, honourable delegates

Italy fully aligns with the intervention of Slovenia on behalf of the EU on the subjects we are discussing here today.

Water and sanitation policies are two areas of high priority for the Italian Cooperation to Sustainable Development. In fact in the last 25 years Italy has devoted more than 35% of its ODA to water and sanitation projects. Italy is very determined to continue along this path. In doing so Italy intends to support the activity of UNSGAB which has produced the Hashimoto Action Plan and the OECD-UNSGAB statement: two excellent pragmatic roadmaps for the International Community to reach the MDGs related to Water and Sanitation.

We are fully aware of the challenges that both developing and developed countries face in their endeavors to reach the Millennium Development Goals in the field of Water and Sanitation. We are fully aware of the present dramatic situation: more than 1 billion people lack access to safe water, some 2.6 billion have no access to proper sanitation. Access to all people to safe water and sanitation must therefore be considered as a global priority. We are committed to an intermediate target of halving these figures by 2015. There is therefore a strong case for advocating more development aid in both providing infrastructure financing and in assisting developing countries in the introduction of advanced techniques for planning and managing scarce financial and natural resources.

Italy has launched a multilateral strategy aimed at promoting better monitoring practices for the water and sanitation sector. Our strategy implies some interrelated strands of action.

- First at the international level, we are carrying on a project with UNDESA, the Global Initiative for Rationalizing Water Information System (GIRWIS), with the goal of creating in developing countries comprehensive water information systems. This project should contribute in building reliable sets of data and procedures for information collection and processing, decision-support systems and tools, data dissemination and monitors indicators gauge changes in progress. The aim

is also to strengthen monitoring capacities in measuring progress toward internationally agreed goals and targets.

- Second the Italian parliament committed the Government to promote an international negotiation aimed at acknowledging the right to water as a fundamental human right and common good.
- Third we are promoting with the OEGD on horizontal project on “Sustainable financing for access to water” a integrated initiative that should help finding innovative models to guarantee equitable and sustainable access to water.
- Furthermore Italy has reached an agreement with UNESCO to have the World Water Assessment Programme in Italy (Perugia). The WWAP was created at the urging of the Commission on Sustainable Development and with the strong endorsement by the Ministerial Conference at the Hague in March 2000, as a collective Un-System with continuing assessment process for water.

Italy is also engaged in cooperative actions and projects based on experiences and technologies already acquired which could be replicated in several sectors related to water and sanitation.

Cooperation projects are touching all continents and focus on prevention of water pollution and other risks, fight against water scarcity, climate change risks and water.

Let me mention, among others, the REHERA methodology (Rapid Environmental and Health Risk Assessment) which consists of an integrated methodology for an environmental and health rapid risk assessment, in case of severe industrial accidents. It is particularly important for the prevention of rivers and ground water contamination from industrial plants and contaminated sites and allows to take preventive measures for their protection. Through its subsequent application, the methodology has been refined and it has been proved that its employment allows to take timely decisions and lower the costs of intervention of rehabilitation. The REHERA software is internationally recognized and now available on line for free so it can be used anywhere, with the only necessity of a short training, for the purpose of risk assessment.

In Egypt, at Bir Gifgafa, it has been put in place an innovative system designed to provide water to the population through a water connection device and a desalination plant. The delivery of water to each household, in order to improve living conditions, required that the existing reservoir be connected to a distribution network which has to be built because there was not one in place. The project brought together major Egyptian stakeholders and decision makers, contributing to improve the national and local policies for the sustainable use of water resources in water deprived areas.

This approach is expected to substantially contribute to the successful implementation of the governmental plan for the settlement of new communities in desert areas.

I wish indeed to stress the importance that the methodologies of all these projects can be replicated.

Let me finally remind the work of the Task Force on Extreme Weather Events under the UNECE Protocol on Water and Health, chaired by Italy, concerning aspects of water supply and sanitation in short-term critical situations and adaptation to climate change. Its work programme is of particular interest because it will deal with:

- (a) Sharing of experience on, and identify relevant local/national good practices regarding, the safe operation of water supply and sanitation facilities in urban and rural areas which are subject to the impact of short-term critical situations; and prepare guidelines to respond to short-term critical situations; and*
- (b) Drafting of a strategy paper on how to cope with the potential impact of climate change, and on adaptation and mitigation programmes for water supply and sanitation.*
- (c) Cooperation with other bodies on drafting guidance on adaptation measures on extreme events (floods and drought).

Mr. Chairman,

Finally I would like to recall that Italy will host in 2009 the Ministerial conference Environment and Health which will be an important event to discuss also about water and climate change, and the G8 where water is indicated as a high priority for discussion under the Italian Presidency.